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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001172

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: AFTER KOREAN REUNIFICATION  
TAGS: PGOV PREL KS KN  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH KIM SOOK: A NUMBER OF  
FIRSTS

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶11. (C) Summary: In a June 9 meeting, Kim Sook, the newly appointed ROK representative to the Six-party Talks, told the Ambassador that he had been treated with respect during his first meeting with his North Korean counterpart, Deputy FM Kim Kye-gwan (KKG), and that KKG had listened intently when Kim explained President Lee's North Korea policy. Similarly, Kim said that officials from the North and South had a good bilateral discussion at Panmunjeom on June 5 to discuss energy assistance as part of the Six-Party Talks--the first meeting between officials from both sides since Lee Myung-bak took office in February. Kim said that he expected the next round of Six-Party Talks to be held shortly after the Energy and Economic Cooperation Working Group meeting on June 11 in the DMZ. On North-South relations, Kim said that he did not expect the North to accept the South's recent offer of 50,000 tons of food aid because of reports that Kim Jong-il had issued instructions that the DPRK was neither to ask for nor accept any food aid from the South at this time. Commenting on the looming changes within the ROKG cabinet resulting from perceived mishandling of the U.S. beef negotiations, Kim said he thought that Foreign Minister Yu was not in danger of being dismissed as he was not involved in the causes of the problem, only in efforts to resolve the issue. End Summary.

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FIRST MEETING BETWEEN THE TWO KIMS  
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¶12. (C) Ambassador-at-large for the Six Party Talks, Kim Sook, told the Ambassador on June 9 that he was somewhat surprised that the DPRK allowed DFM Kim Kye-gwan to meet with him in Beijing on May 30. Ambassador Kim was traveling in Moscow on the suggested date for the meeting, but KKG agreed to stay an extra day in Beijing in order to meet with Ambassador Kim (Note: This was the first time the two had met in person after Kim Sook took over as the chief negotiator for the Six-Party Talks in April. End Note.). Ambassador Kim said that his North Korean counterpart was "calm and gentle" during their meeting and treated him with respect.

¶13. (C) Ambassador Kim said that he took the opportunity to raise the broader issue of North-South relations and explained that the South did not have a hostile policy toward the North. He told KKG that if the DPRK gave up its nuclear weapons and material, the South was ready to help the North in five areas: economy, finance, education, infrastructure and general quality of life for North Koreans. Kim said that

he also asked the North to stop slandering President Lee Myung-bak because, in the end, the North and the South would eventually need to sit down and work with each other on a number of issues. Kim said that KKG listened intently but could not offer any response to these points as he said it was not his area of responsibility.

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FIRST NORTH-SOUTH MEETING UNDER NEW ADMINISTRATION  
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¶ 14. (C) Kim said that the first official meeting between officials from the North and South under the Lee Myung-bak Administration on June 5 went well. Kim said that the DPRK officials who attended the bilateral discussion, held at Panmunjeom in the DMZ to discuss energy cooperation as part of the Six-Party Talks, had "listened well" to the same talking points on North-South relations that Kim had used with KKG, and wrote feverishly despite their opening position that they could not accept the South's points. Although there had not been any dialogue under the South's new administration, Kim said that he expected this to change as the Six-Party Talks made new progress in the coming weeks.

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PROSPECTS FOR SIX-PARTY TALKS PROGRESS  
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¶ 15. (C) Kim said that it had been difficult trying to find an agreeable date for the next Heads of Delegation meeting under the Six-Party Talks. The Chinese proposed dates of June 15-17 were agreeable to the ROKG but Japan had voiced concern given a conflict on those dates with the ROK-Japan-China

trilateral Ministerial meeting being hosted in Japan. As an alternative, Japan had recommended June 17-19.

¶ 16. (C) Kim said that during the June 5 meeting in the DMZ, the DPRK side had reiterated the importance of more timely delivery of the promised energy assistance. Before a Six-Party Heads of Delegation meeting could be convened, the North wanted to hold an Energy and Economic Cooperation Working Group (EECWG) meeting in hopes of getting a fixed schedule of the final shipments of heavy fuel oil and equivalent assistance. If the DPRK was satisfied with the results of this meeting, they would then commit to a date for the Heads of Delegation meeting. If Japan remained adamant that it would not contribute to HFO shipments, KKG had suggested the other four parties should agree to cover Japan's portion of the agreement. Although the Chinese and Russians strongly opposed the idea, Kim said that the ROK was "willing to be generous" and help cover Japan's portion.

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DISPOSITION OF FRESH FUEL RODS  
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¶ 17. (C) According to Amb. Kim, North Korea preferred to make a decision on disposal of the fresh fuel rods as the last step in the disablement process. Although the North had previously stated its intent to sell the rods, a formal decision had not yet been made. Kim said that KKG had told him that he wanted to first talk to the U.S. side about implementing the various steps involved in the disablement process. Kim Sook said that he saw no grounds for discussion between the U.S. and DPRK on the issue as the fuel rods in question could only be used in the ROK, and this was only after additional preparation tasks costing USD 10 million. North Korea was sure to agree to sell the rods to the ROK as it would provide them with additional compensation, whereas bending the rods would not.

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PHASE THREE AND BEYOND  
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¶ 18. (C) Kim said that he asked KKG about the prospect of North Korea declaring its nuclear weapons as part of their

forthcoming nuclear declaration. The response was that if the South had concerns about dismantlement, it should review the September 2005 Agreement in which the North promised to give up all of its nuclear weapons. The weapons would be abandoned in the final phase of the process, not in the near term, Kim said. The final phase would be an exchange of nuclear weapons for normalization of relations with the U.S. Kim added that the North would want to verify that the U.S. had removed all nuclear weapons from South Korea and suggested the North would be interested in seeing records to corroborate the South's claimed denuclearization.

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FOOD AID FOR THE NORTH  
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¶ 9. (C) When asked about the prospects of North Korea agreeing to accept the South's offer of 50,000 tons of food aid, Kim responded that he had seen intelligence reports that claim Kim Jong-il had issued a memo that the North was not to accept or ask for aid from the South this year. Kim said that the ROKG was considering the option of providing some aid to the World Food Program that could be then passed on to the North, but the current preoccupation with the U.S. beef issue had required everyone's full attention and therefore a decision had not yet been made.

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NORTH KOREA-JAPAN BILATS  
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¶ 10. (C) Kim said that he did not have any detailed information about the Japan-North Korea bilateral discussions that were held on June 7-8 in Beijing. On the positive side, at least the two parties had agreed to meet again on June 11-12 unlike the previous meeting that ended after ten minutes, Kim noted. When asked if there was anything to press reports that the DPRK was likely to return a relative of one of the Japanese abductees to break the current impasse, Kim responded that it was more likely that the former members of the Red Army would be repatriated to Japan, even though this is technically an unrelated issue.

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NORTHEAST ASIA PEACE AND SECURITY MECHANISM  
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¶ 11. (C) Kim said that he did not raise NEAPSM during his meeting with KKG but noted that the Russians needed more time before they would be ready to discuss the issue. The Japanese side still had some reservations, but the ROKG welcomed NEAPSM, as long as it supported North Korea's denuclearization and remained separate from any peace regime discussions. Kim said that Deputy Secretary Negroponte's recent visit to Korea to discuss the issue was quite helpful in providing the ROKG with a clearer understanding of U.S. views on NEAPSM.

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POSSIBLE CABINET CHANGES  
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¶ 12. (C) According to Kim, public opinion in Korea remained very fragile and it was still not clear where it was headed in regard to the U.S. beef issue. Kim said that the looming cabinet reshuffle was likely to take place later this week and could have some impact on North Korea policy. As key personnel changed, possibly including the Prime Minister and Blue House Chief of Staff, some "minor" policy changes were also possible. Kim said that he was confident that Foreign Minister Yu would be spared from the reshuffle as he was seen more as a "firefighter" and not an "arsonist," working to resolve the issue rather than having been involved in the original beef negotiations. Although the troubles in Korea represented a political struggle, Koreans also had concerns about U.S. beef that should not be ignored.

VERSHBOW